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Escalation Against Iran

The Pieces Are Being Put in Place

By Col. Sam Gardner

01/16/07 "Counterpunch" -- -- The pieces are moving. They'll be in place by the end of February. The United States will be able to escalate military operations against Iran.

The second carrier strike group leaves the U.S. west coast on January 16. It will be joined by naval mine clearing assets from both the United States and the UK. Patriot missile defense systems have also been ordered to deploy to the Gulf.

Maybe as a guard against North Korea seeing operations focused on Iran as a chance to be aggressive, a squadron of F-117 stealth fighters has just been deployed to Korea.

This has to be called escalation. We have to remind ourselves, just as Iran is supporting groups inside Iraq, the United States is supporting groups inside Iran. Just as Iran has special operations troops operating inside Iraq, we've read the United States has special operations troops operating inside Iran.

Just as Iran is supporting Hamas, two weeks ago we found out the United States is supporting arms for Abbas. Just as Iran and Syria are supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon we're now learning the White House has approved a finding to allow the CIA to support opposition groups inside Lebanon. Just as Iran is supporting Syria, we've learned recently that the United States is going to fund Syrian opposition groups.

We learned this week the President authorized an attack on the Iranian liaison office in Irbil.

The White House keeps saying there are no plans to attack Iran. Obviously, the facts suggest otherwise. Equally as clear, the Iranians will read what the Administrations is doing not what it is saying.

It is possible the White House strategy is just implementing a strategy to put pressure on Iran on a number of fronts, and this will never amount to anything. On the other hand, if the White House is on a path to strike Iran, we'll see a few more steps unfold.

First, we know there is a National Security Council staff-led group whose mission is to create outrage in the world against Iran. Just like before Gulf II, this media group will begin to release stories to sell a strike against Iran. Watch for the outrage stuff. The Patriot missiles going to the GCC states are only part of the missile defense assets. I would expect to see the deployment of some of the European-based missile defense assets to Israel, just as they were before Gulf II.

I would expect deployment of additional USAF fighters into the bases in Iraq, maybe some into Afghanistan.

I think we will read about the deployment of some of the newly arriving Army brigades going into Iraq being deployed to the border with Iran. Their mission will be to guard against any

Iranian movements into Iraq.

As one of the last steps before a strike, we'll see USAF tankers moved to unusual places, like Bulgaria. These will be used to refuel the US-based B-2 bombers on their strike missions into Iran. When that happens, we'll only be days away from a strike.

The White House could be telling the truth. Maybe there are no plans to take Iran to the next level. The fuel for a fire is in place, however. All we need is a spark. The danger is that we have created conditions that could lead to a Greater Middle East War.

Sam Gardiner is a retired colonel of the US Air Force. He has taught strategy and military operations at the National War College, Air War College and Naval War College.

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